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ONLINE VIDEO

Authorities warned in May of armed militia

Local freelancer raised concerns over online video

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LANSING — Lawmakers and other Michigan officials were

warned in May about possible ill-intentions of armed militia, and of radio communications suggesting supporters could force their way into the state Capitol Building, the Record-Eagle has learned.

The Michigan State Police on Friday confirmed receipt of a May 20 email, including a link to a YouTube video filmed inside the Capitol and narrated by a man the author of the email has since identified as William Null.

Anti-government groups shift focus to states. Page 6A

arraigned Thursday on federal or state felony terrorism and firearms charges following an investigation into a plot to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and overthrow the government.

"There was no action or request required of the MSP," said Shanon

SEE WARNING PAGE 2A



Eric VanDussen is seen in front of the Hall of Justice in Traverse City in this submitted photograph.

Special to the Record-Eagle



Physical education and health teacher Katie Tomczyk leads students on a hike near the Greenspire School in Traverse City.

Record-Eagle/Mike Krebs

TAKE IT OUTSIDE

Teachers moving classes outdoors to follow COVID protocols

BY BRENDAN QUEALY
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Whitmer

BELLAIRE — The 13th person accused of plotting to kidnap and execute Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has been charged.

Shawn Fix, a 38-year-old Bellevue resident, was arraigned before 86th District Court Magistrate Tammi Rodgers first thing Friday morning.

Fix, who appeared via Zoom, wore the weathered black-and-white-striped garb of the Antrim County Jail, and stood solemnly before the screen.

He and a slew of fellow Michigan residents — and one Delaware man — face charges, either in state or federal court, stemming from accusations they spent months preparing for an assault on Whitmer's northern Michigan home. A 15-page affidavit by FBI Special Agent Richard J. Trask II filed in U.S. District court describes a multi-state investigation by FBI agents and MSP investigators who employed both confidential informants and undercover

SEE PLOT PAGE 2A

walk up some steep hills, down some sandy dunes and winding through the woods.

All while getting a lesson in respect for nature.

Students at the Greenspire School are

used to outdoor learning. The practice, which has been a part of the middle school since its inception, is buoyed by the 140 acres of the Grand Traverse Commons natural area that butts up against

SEE OUTSIDE PAGE 2A

2A

WARNING

Local freelancer raised concerns over online video

FROM PAGE 1A

Banner, MSP public affairs manager," so upon receiving the message, I forwarded it on to our Special Operations Division for their situational awareness since they have responsibility for security at the Capitol."

The email, from Benzonia videographer and freelance journalist Eric VanDussen, was sent to the Governor's Office, the Attorney General's Office, all members of the Michigan Legislature and the Michigan Capital Commission, information provided the Record-Eagle shows.

"There's state troopers and capital security, and

they have side arms, but there's multiple individuals standing over them with semi-automatic weapons," VanDussen said. "With what they are saying was their plan, it's crazy that no one put an emphasis on curtailing that type of weaponry going into the Michigan Capital."

"Hopefully," VanDussen added, "this is going to be a wake-up call."

As of today, guns are still allowed inside the Capitol. A bill co-sponsored by Dayna Polehanki, which would ban all firearms from the building, is languishing in the Committee on Government Operations, where bills go to, "sit and die," Polehanki said Friday.

"There are two entities that have legal authority to ban firearms from our Capitol," Polehanki said. "One is the Legislature, the other is the Capitol Commission."

The Capitol Commission was created in 2013 to man-

age the building, preserve its history and maintain the facility as a working museum that also functions as an office building, said John Truscott, commission vice-chair.

"Law enforcement was well aware of the situation and the people involved," Truscott said in an email. "The Capitol Commission does not have a role in enforcing the laws or dealing with criminal issues."

"By law, The Senate and House govern their respective Chambers and office space, not the Capitol Commission," Truscott added. "That's why the House and Senate sergeants were front and center dealing with these individuals — with the full support of Michigan State Police."

The AG's office issued an opinion May 8, confirming that the Commission has the legal authority to prohibit the presence of firearms in the state Capitol, if it

chooses to do so.

"They've put off doing anything for seven months in a row," Polehanki said. "They were supposed to meet Monday but that meeting was canceled and I was told it was because there was nothing to put on the agenda."

Polehanki said she does not feel safe and keeps a bulletproof vest under her desk "in case anything happens again like what happened April 30."

VanDussen described the conversations and behavior of those in the April 30 video as "extremely distressing," which inspired him to send it to more than 100 state officials, he said.

Curt Vanderwall said his staff may have seen the email and YouTube video but he had not. Polehanki's staffer Dan Centers said their policy was to forward any concerning email to the senate sergeant at arms and that's what he likely did

with the email from VanDussen.

Much of Null's video, which VanDussen said he copied from the Facebook page of Phil Robinson, a co-founder of the Michigan Liberty Militia, is filled with vulgarities and repeated discussions about possible violence.

Null appears unmasked in the video, both in Lansing's Capitol rotunda, as well as in the gallery of the building's chambers. He wears a "Michigan Liberty Militia" patch and occasionally speaks over a two-way radio with others outside the Capitol building, or in other parts of the building, seemingly coordinating efforts to push past security officials' attempts to limit capacity amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

About 19 minutes into the video, a bystander tells Null: "I'm not going to lie, though — the shooting starts happening and I'm heading

up north, you know that."

Null quickly responds, "Not me, dude. I'm going to have fun hunting," he can be heard saying, followed by laughter.

In the email, VanDussen highlighted the men's tactical behavior as particularly disturbing.

"The men depicted in the video were also communicating by walkie-talkies with their fellow militia members that were situated at various locations throughout the Capitol building and grounds.

They were equipped like a SWAT team and they suggested — over their walkie-talkies — that their companions outside should force their way past the MSP officers to gain access to the Capitol."

Gov. Whitmer's press secretary Tiffany Brown and AG press secretary Ryan Jarvi both declined comment, citing the ongoing criminal investigation.

OUTSIDE

FROM PAGE 1A

campus.

Kai Schweigert, a first-timer at Greenspire and a former Willow Hill Elementary student, said learning outside is "a big improvement."

"At my old school, we were just inside all day," he said. "We didn't have much outdoor time there."

Learning outside increased at Greenspire for the first few weeks of the year because of the executive-ordered restrictions and protocols put in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Schweigert said he wasn't too worried about COVID. He was more concerned about making friends at a new school.

Greenspire Head of School Robert Walker is worried about COVID, however.

Walker said school officials chose to keep the maximum number of students in a classroom to 12. That caused an issue.

Greenspire usually operates with six pods of students. Dropping the class size to 12 meant 10 classrooms were needed. Greenspire only has eight indoor spaces that could function as learning spaces.

Classes usually held inside — math, literature and health — were moved outside, but it wasn't as beneficial as the normal slate of outdoor classes. Instead of two hours of outside instruction, students were outside four hours a day.

"We were literally all over the place," Walker said. "It was functional but not sustainable, and it was going to drive people to the brink."

The weather was also an issue. Too hot. Too cold. Rain. Walker said they lucked out most days, but he knows how temperamental northern Michigan weather can be.

"We were on some series



Record-Eagle/Mike Krebs

Physical education and health teacher Katie Tomczyk takes attendance before leading students on a hike near at Greenspire School in Traverse City.

ous borrowed time," he said. "We knew it was going to come and get us."

The decision was made to move from five days a week in person to a hybrid model, three days at school and two days learning virtually from home.

But some area teachers are embracing being outside with their students for as long as it lasts.

Leah Lawson, an art instructor who teaches Young Fives through fifth-graders at Glen Lake Community Schools, had her students pick up "natural drawing tools" — rocks, sticks, pine needles, acorns — to paint. The natural tools decreased the need to disinfect normal art supplies.

Lawson told them to find inspiration in nature and then create. They also discussed the cave paintings at Lascaux in southwestern France and whether or not people are taught to be artists or a naturally artists. Her students also did sun prints and talked about Charles Darwin.

"We're really being scientists and artists," Lawson said. "A lot of what we're doing is experimenting and scientific."

Lawson said COVID pushed her in a new direction.

"It made me think in a different way," she said. "If being inside won't work, why don't we just be in nature."

Cathy Kangas, a math teacher at Glen Lake High School, said choir and public speaking classes are sometimes held outside. Portable white boards are taken outdoors to teach math and science. Students also collect data and conduct experiments.

Kangas said sometimes she'll see students just sitting under the shade of a tree and doing their homework.

Laine Kyser and Brianna Rousos, fourth-grade teachers at Central Grade Elementary, found being outside gives students a break from all the necessary precautions inside.

"You can tell sometimes when the kids need a little mask break," Kyser said. "We can go outside and still social distance."

Rousos said teaching outside is already proven to decrease stress levels and increase engagement. She has only seen those benefits improve this school year.

Kyser has seen "absolute-ly no drawbacks."

"The kids look forward to it," she said. "They understand the expectations and are engaged. They want this privilege."

Outside learning likely will continue for as long as Mother Nature allows it — but northern Michiganders know cold weather and snow could arrive much sooner than anyone wants.



Franks Morrison



Croft Bellar



Musico Bellar



Caserta Fox



Harris Michael Null



William Null Molitor

mer. Fix and the other three men will return to court for preliminary exams on Oct. 28 at 1:30 p.m.

Fix is also set for a probable cause hearing — typically conducted between case attorneys — comes at 1 p.m. Oct. 21.

See updates at www.record-eagle.com.

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